



March 31, 2020

RE: ACCESS report to Story Co. Board of Supervisors 4-7-20

Dear Board of Supervisors,

Thank you for your continued support of meeting the needs of Story County crime victims through the ASSET process. Since my last report we have seen many changes—especially in response to COVID-19. My report includes a review of final numbers from last year, how the claims process is progressing this year, highlights of our COVID -19 contingency planning and a project building up to our 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Each year I'm amazed by the tenacity and resilience of survivors and the creativity ACCESS staff. This past year was no exception. One example of innovation has been incorporating a new tool related to victim impact statements within the criminal justice system. We have been utilizing a picture based tool that assists non-verbal survivors in telling the judge how they were impacted by the violence as they consider sentencing. We have seen the tool enable survivors with disabilities and child survivors to have their voices heard.

Through our annual data review, we that last year (ending July) we served 1,418 survivors of sexual abuse, domestic abuse, homicide and other violent crime with 8,165.75 hours of services. This included serving 596 survivors from Story County with 3726.5 hours of service. This is right in line with the total number of clients served in FY 16 and FY 17. Beginning part way through last year, we saw an increase in total service hours per month and provided 1,000 additional bed nights of emergency shelter over the previous year! We believe the increase in service hours is related to a new database system that more accurately captures the work we do. We utilized the old system to generate the FY 19 total numbers, but will be using the new database for FY 20. We believe the increase in bed nights is related to our work to address housing staff turnover.

This current year has been on track to serve a similar number of clients, though we are watching how numbers are changing as we incorporate response to the COVID-19 crisis into how our services function. To date we have the following remaining in each ASSET category for Story County:

- Emergency housing/shelter: \$14,929.50 (accurate through February)

- Domestic Abuse: \$4,278 (accurate through February)
- Sexual Abuse: Completely claimed
- Court Watch: Completely claimed
- Public Education: \$520 (accurate through January)

The last few weeks have marked a challenging time for ACCESS as well as other providers as we work to adapt services in response to the COVID-19 crisis. We have done a lot of contingency planning and adapted over time. In the coming months we will likely have to continue to pivot services to match the needs of survivors and guidance from health officials. Some highlights of where we are currently:

- Our crisis lines remain active and operated as normal.
- Beginning in mid-March most of our counseling services were shifted and offered remotely including phone and text based services. As of the last week of March we have begun training staff and utilizing a tele health option for video/audio appointments. We have utilized a combination of phone based services and follow up appointments for response to hospital sexual assault exams.
- We reduced our shelter census so that we only house one individual or one family per bedroom. We are still taking new intakes, however depending on the combination of individuals versus families may have fewer beds available.
- All staff members who can are working remotely. We have worked with staff to ensure that they have space at home that they can secure client files, field confidential calls, and continue to provide remote advocacy services.
- We postponed events planned for late March and April. We are in the process of exploring alternative ways to do community engagement and education. We hope to roll out new strategies for these services in the coming weeks.
  - This is particularly disappointing timing as April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM). We are in the process of re-evaluating what we can do to appropriately recognize SAAM.
  - We had a thriving support group running prior to COVID arriving in Iowa. The group decided to shift to an online group that continued to connect bi-weekly and has been very active despite making this shift. We are hopeful that creativity will help us continue to meet the needs of survivors.

Currently we have told staff that we will reassess the situation April 13<sup>th</sup> and decide which measures to continue. We are simultaneously planning for the likelihood of following the Governor's recommendations through the end of the month. The decisions to adapt our services were based on guidance from our state certifying agencies, guidance from HUD and the CDC, an in-depth look at the risk pool of our staff, ability to offer safe services to survivors and the responsibility we have as potential cross county vectors of transmission. These were really difficult decisions and we will continue to review and adjust as the context changes.

We have two other projects to highlight that started prior to the COVID response and continue currently. First is our 'Frame Our Futures' project which is aimed at securing funds for repairs to rotten

and incorrectly installed windows, sliding glass doors and siding on agency owned shelter units. We have secured funds for the rotten windows and have replaced those. We are in the process of securing funds for the remaining work to address continued water issues and prevent further rotting.

The second is 'ACCESS-ing Our History,' an oral history project in which we are reconnecting with past volunteers, board members and staff to gather stories about our agency over our 45 year history. Our 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary is in February 2021. We have partnered with KHOI to complete the first wave of interviews. We continue to collect interviews using skype recordings. In the coming months we hope to continue our collaboration with KHOI to air edited versions of the compiled interviews, create an archive with the Ames History Museum, and (public health warnings pending) host a series of events clustered around our 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

To close, I share a quote from our ACCESS-ing Our History Project. A volunteer of ACCESS reflected on why he was passionate about the need for services over 15 years of volunteer service, "It was like they [survivors] didn't count, but I believe everybody counts the same. People need to count." We couldn't agree more and are thankful to our community partners who believe the same. Despite these challenging times we work to continue to support survivors at the center of our decisions. Thank you for your continued work to support survivors and addressing violence in Story County.

Respectfully,

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